

Probate Court Budget Committee

Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, March 28, 2018
5:00 p.m.

Library at the Office of the Probate Court Administrator
186 Newington Road, West Hartford, CT

The meeting was convened at 5:02 p.m.

In attendance: Judge Paul Knierim, Probate Court Administrator and Chair, with Judges Joseph Marino and Fred Anthony

Public Comment and Correspondence

3 letters from Judge Foye Smith, Hartford Probate Court
Letter from Judge Mathew Greene, New London Probate Court

Remarks

Judge Knierim described the status of the state budget process. He stated that the top priorities for the Probate Court system this year are suspension of the June 30, 2018 automatic sweep of the Probate Court Administration Fund and alerting legislators to restore Probate Court funding to normal levels in fiscal year 2019-20.

Adopt Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Office Budgets

Andrea King explained the proposed court office budgets for fiscal year 2018-19. The criteria, which the committee approved at its December 6, 2018 meeting, are unchanged from fiscal year 2017-18.

Judge Marino made a motion to approve the office budgets for fiscal year 2018-19. Judge Anthony seconded the motion. Judge Knierim called for a vote and the motion passed unanimously.

Request of Hartford Probate Court to add security guard staff position

Judge Foye Smith of the Hartford Probate Court requested a staffing level adjustment to add a part-time security guard. Judge Smith attended the meeting to explain the security issues at her court. She cited an increasing number of incidents involving parties acting in an aggressive manner, the lack of separate emergency egress, problems with the lock down mechanism and difficulties with local police response. In addition, she submitted letters from two attorneys who practice in the court describing concerns with the lack of security personnel at the court.

After discussing the request with Judge Smith and her staff, it was the consensus of committee members to refer the issue to the Court Security Committee for further analysis. Judge Knierim will contact security committee chair Judge Anthony DePanfilis and ask that the committee meet with Judge Smith to evaluate options to address the security issues, including physical modifications to the court facility, security staff and clarifying municipal police responsibility. The Budget Committee will meet again to discuss the Security Committee's recommendations after completion of its work.

Request of New London Probate Court for title change and compensation adjustment

Judge Greene submitted a letter to the Budget Committee requesting a job title change from assistant clerk to clerk and an increase in compensation for a staff member. Judge Greene attended the meeting to articulate the reasons and advocate for the requested increase. He cited several distinctions in support of his request, including the overall efficiency of the court, the fact that all staff members perform the same work functions, the fact that the court operates with fewer staff than permitted by its benchmark staffing level and the fact that the court's benchmark staffing level is lower than justified based on weighted workload.

Judge Knierim recommended against the requested adjustment. He stressed that the Budget Committee seeks to maintain a consistent proportion among the clerk and assistant clerk positions at all courts. The result of the proposed change would be that all court staff (other than chief clerk) at the New London Court would be clerks with no assistant clerks. Judge Knierim also noted that the effect of the change would be to confer a raise on one employee when all other employees in the system are subject to a wage freeze.

Judge Marino made a motion to deny the request. Judge Anthony seconded the motion. Judges Knierim and Marino voted yes. Judge Anthony voted no. The motion passed.

Staffing Level Adjustments for Fairfield County Family Specialists

Judge Knierim recommended that two family specialists be added to the Bridgeport Probate Court's staffing plan. The authorization will enable the system to begin providing children's court services in Fairfield County without incurring the expenses of establishing a seventh Regional Children's Probate Court. The Bridgeport family specialists will be available to handle children's matters in surrounding courts.

Judge Anthony made a motion to approve the staffing level adjustment. Judge Marino seconded the motion. Judge Knierim called for a vote and the motion passed unanimously.

Other Business

None

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on June 13, 2018 at 5:00 p.m. at Probate Court Administration.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.